



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

TO: All Department of Agriculture Employees and Contractor Employees,
Washington D.C. Headquarters Complex

Office of Operations

THROUGH: Lou Gallegos *Lou Gallegos*
Assistant Secretary for Administration

JAN 27 2003

1400 Independence
Avenue SW

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Washington, DC
20250-9800

SUBJECT: Update on Safety and Security Measures at USDA Headquarters

Since the events of September 11, 2001, we all share a heightened concern for the safety and security of our families, friends, co-workers and ourselves. While this is true in the public places where people visit and work throughout the country, it is especially true in cities like Washington, D.C. and New York. USDA employees have expressed their concerns about these matters either **through their agency representatives or directly** to the responsible officials of the Department. We in Departmental Administration (DA) have been working over the past year to advance the safety and security of USDA employees and facilities, locally and nationally.

A significant challenge is communications. Starting in October 2001, and operating continuously since then, local and 800 telephone numbers (202-690-3636 and 1-800-932-1902) were established so employees can receive updates on our buildings' open or closed status following emergencies, and other pertinent information. At the same time, we published new DA web pages publicizing these numbers and providing regularly updated information about Occupant Emergency Plans for USDA facilities and notices of potential interest to our employees about safety and security issues.

Information has also been regularly provided to all employees through broadcast voice and electronic mail, so that everyone knows what has occurred and what steps we are taking for the future. Both of these technologies can be effective tools. However, the time required to transmit a broadcast message during prime business hours reduces their effectiveness for emergency use. As a result we have a number of emergency response projects underway. The following summarizes some of the key projects:

- Installation of a state-of-the-art public address system in the Cotton Annex, South Building, and Whitten Building started in November 2002, and is estimated for full completion in April 2003. The system is compatible with one recently installed in the Yates Building. With over 2 million square feet of space to cover, a professional design and installation plan was needed to ensure the system would be both effective and flexible for USDA's needs. This will be a valuable tool for providing timely information to all occupants during emergencies.

- A Computer Emergency Notification System (CENS) has been developed and is currently being tested on all headquarters systems. The system is based on a system used at the Pentagon, with special screen readers for the visually impaired. The system will trigger each employee's desktop computer to query a dedicated server about every 20 seconds to see if an emergency message has been posted. If one is found, an alarm will sound on each computer and the emergency message will appear, taking up the entire screen. It will be another valuable tool for informing building occupants of emergency situations and for providing instructions tailored to the emergency. A short briefing about the system is on the DA web site. This briefing will give you a visual of what to expect when we put CENS in operation in February.
- The two-way radio system that in the past was only used for facilities operations and maintenance communications became an invaluable tool on September 11, 2001, when telephone circuits became overloaded. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, we provided radios to senior mission area personnel and other senior staff. Using technical expertise from the Forest Service, we are currently expanding the system for wider area coverage throughout the DC metropolitan area (DC and the Virginia and Maryland suburbs) with an estimated completion date for the expansion in May 2003. Until the expansion, the existing radio system remains fully operational.
- We recently completed an initial evaluation of what is needed to improve wireless communication signals for cellular telephones, pagers, and personal digital assistants in the below ground levels of the South and Whitten buildings. This project will be starting soon and will be completed this year.
- Automatic External Defibrillators (AED's) are installed throughout our facilities and training in their use was provided to all security officers. The AED's are available for use by any trained responders and not just the officers. We are aware that a number of employees are trained in emergency response, and several have inquired about AED training. It is available on a regular basis through the Employee Services and Recreation Association (ESRA). They accept government training forms for payment.
- GSA approved occupant emergency plans are posted at <http://www.hqnet.usda.gov/da/>. Employees can reach that site from the USDA home page by clicking on USDA Offices, then Departmental Administration, and finally on "USDA Employee Information Center."
- Training for floor wardens, area monitors, and floor monitors is ongoing, with volunteers always needed. Send an e-mail inquiry to ChiefWASC@usda.gov if you are interested. Upcoming training will focus on employee drills and incorporate the use of the new notification systems.

The November 13, 2002, incident on Independence Avenue highlighted the critical role timely and effective communications play in any emergency. Despite not having all the planned emergency communications tools in place yet, the USDA emergency team members worked quickly, sometimes creatively, and always steadfastly, to ensure the safety of building occupants. After action reviews of the team's efforts by the Federal Protective Service said that ensuring occupant safety was the priority for the USDA team and it was well handled. Soon we will have additional technology in place to enhance our ability to send authoritative and simultaneous emergency messages throughout the complex. I want to assure every employee that dedicated and trained personnel are in place to handle emergencies affecting you and your visitors in our buildings.